



EXPERT TRAINING TIPS: A Four Part Series

Hit the Ground, Running or Walking: A Ground-Up Approach to Maximizing your Running and Walking Programs

Part 3: The Hip & Spine

How Optimizing Your Hips and Core Can Help Keep Your Running and Walking Program Moving Forward

Runners and walkers are often told of the importance of gait, foot contact, shoe selection, and more when it comes to performance and health out on the trail. Having stable, healthy feet with mobile ankles and strong knees can go a long way to helping keep fit for running and walking. It also shouldn't be a surprise to hear that the hip and abdominal musculature stabilizing the spine and pelvis are critically important in this process. Having good mobility and stability of your hips and spine allow runners and walkers to fully utilize their knees, ankles and feet for optimal performance.

The hip is centrally important during both running and walking as the action of extending your hip allows the leg below to transfer force into the ground to push you forward. The muscle primarily responsible for that action, the gluteus maximus, is a big and strong muscle that surrounds the back side of your hip. Underneath the gluteus maximus are a group of smaller muscles that are very specifically designed to help you move and rotate your hips. The posterior hip muscles work together to extend your hip, pushing your thigh backwards and thus moving you forward. Muscles on the front side of your hip also play a role in this process. Too often, the muscles that lift or flex your hip forward can become tight or restricted over time. When this occurs, your hip cannot extend fully to optimally position your leg for pushing your body forward.

While trying to maintain optimal motion in your hips, it is also important to consider the position of your pelvis and spine. Your hip joints are attached to your pelvis, which sits at the base of your spine. The position of your pelvis can tilt in ways that make it more difficult for the muscles of your hip to do their job optimally. This means that despite continued efforts you take to keep your hips mobile and moving well, the limiting factor of your performance might be centered on the position of your pelvis. In general, it is more ideal for runners and walkers

to be able to maintain a more neutral position with their pelvis to help optimize the range of motion of the hip joint during movement.

It is important to utilize core stability exercises to help improve your body's ability to maintain a neutral pelvis during those activities. These types of exercises can be done as part of a short dynamic warm up prior to your run or walk. As a reminder, it is indeed good for runners and walkers to strengthen their hip and leg musculature through resistance training. When done with proper technique, squatting, lunging, and deadlift variations will not only help enhance hip health and mobility, but they can also help improve your running and walking performance as well.

It is important to note, taking care of your hips and spine is something that needs attention throughout the day, and not just specifically during a workout or a walk. Being seated for long periods of time at work can impact your spine, pelvis, and hips alike. Taking frequent and consistent breaks to stand and move around can be helpful in supporting the musculature of your pelvis and hips. When you need to be seated, emphasizing good posture that is paired with a well set up workstation can help keep your spine and hips in better working order.

Keeping your hips and pelvis functioning well can help accelerate your running and walking performance!

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